

A day in the life of Newark

By MARK FINSTON

A minute after the midnight chimes have struck next Thursday, dozens of photographers will electrically thousands of flash tubes in the City of Newark, pay hundreds of roles of film into a great many cameras, record the activities of a great many citizens who venture into public areas during a 24-hour period.

The project, the brainchild of two part-time photographers who are Newark residents, is called, "A Day in the City." The two, Manna K. Mussa and Eddie Johnson Jr., are not unaware of the success of the composite titled, "A Day in the Life of America."

"This city never sleeps, and nei-

ther will we, for 24 hours," says Mussa.

The project also excites Mayor Sharpe James, who notes that a 24-hour photography blitz wouldn't produce much excitement in places like "Deal, Stokes Pass or Short Hills."

Moreover, it will give James something to crow about a week later when he travels to Newark, Calif., for a three-day meeting with mayors of the nine other U.S. cities named Newark. The proposed perley originated in the California city, whose citizens, after rebuffing an attempt to change the name of the municipality, decided to cry up to all the other Newarks at some super Newark summit meeting.

"We'll exchange stories and artifacts," says James. "And I hope I'll be

able to show them some pictures from the 24-hour shoot."

Thirty photographers, of whom 13 are fulltime professionals, will participate in the shutter shoulder, although not all will work a full 24 hours. If it rains, tough there will be no rain date. Mussa and Johnson will attempt to make certain that all main areas of the city—certainly all five wards—are covered, although they concede a street might be missed here and there.

There are mysteries even to lifetime residents of a city.

"Neither one of us has ever been down to Port Newark," says Johnson.

"And I want to explore the brown-brown sections," says Mussa. "It's a curio in Newark, and I've never really

explored it."

"I used to pass through that section when I was going to school on the bus," agrees Johnson. "But I've never walked around in it."

Johnson, 35, is a research assistant in a hospital. The 29-year-old Mussa works as a graphic designer in a copy shop. Both men are avid photographers.

The idea started small. The two of them would spend 24 hours photographing Newark.

"It would be something totally different from what we're used to doing," recalls Johnson.

But the concept expanded because, as Mussa notes, "Working with other

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Manna K. Mussa, left, and Eddie Johnson, project creators, explain their plans for a one-day program photographing Newark. Photo by John A. Gibson Jr.

Photographers to profile a day in the life of Newark

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photographers is fun. They're an eclectic group of erry individuals."

There was another motivation: Both had long chafed under the unfortunate reputation their home town has gained.

"We want to dispel some of those degrading images," says Johnson. "I don't feel like I'm degraded just because I live here."

Nevertheless, both men acknowledge that unfavorable or unsavory scenes may crop up during a 24-hour period, and one or more of the 30 photographers could well be on the scene.

"We have to record it," shrugs Messa. "It's our responsibility to shoot what we see. Whether such a picture will get into our exhibit is another question."

The eventual exhibit will feature between 100 and 150 pieces of work, initially selected by each photographer from his or her best shots, then further narrowed by the two organizers. Target date for the exhibit is next spring, with a preview showing of 25 pictures in a

branch of the New York Public Library.

But no site has been found in Newark to mount the complete exhibit. The organizers say that the Newark Museum, the logical spot, is booked up. Mayor James says it may be possible to show the pictures at Essex County College or in the renovated Symphony Hall.

Both men talk of a tour of the exhibit, of a possible book, a videotape, even postcards. And, if this "Day in the City" is a success, there are other days in other places. Messa and Johnson confide they've been approached by a state transportation official who is interested in "A Day in New Jersey Transit."

And, Johnson dreams, there's Washington, Watts, Chicago, and "maybe someplace where there aren't many people, like Idaho or Montana." Messa adds Greenwich Village, Boston, Miami and Los Angeles ("I've never been to Los Angeles; it would be interesting to see what you could come up with in 24 hours in a city you've never been to before.")

Neither mentioned Newark, Calif.

Messa & Johnson, and other photographers, are working on the exhibit project.

Sept. 10 chosen as day to shoot a portrait of Newark

Big cities, no matter what the time of day, are always in motion. From the wee hours of the morning to late at night, there is always something going on somewhere in a city. Two Newark residents hope to show that activity, as well as the diversity of their hometown in a project called "A Day in the City," which will take place in the 24-hour period starting at 6 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 10.

Inspired by recent well known projects under the heading of "A Day in the Life of..." the Newark photographers hope to visually record as many different aspects of the city as possible, and are recruiting many others to help them.

Edith Johnson Jr. and Maura K. Massa have been assembling their project a bit like a church supper. One company has acted as a law firm of sorts, the city has offered the support of its public information office, and negotiations are currently proceeding with a major Newark firm to get money in real estate for aerial shots. It's been that kind of effort, Massa said.

"People have come across to us in surprising ways," he said, citing an offer from the city to let the photographers feature their images on its 1989 calendar.

"We've been saving a lot," he added. "We've been saving images in different places—having family type our baby, make telephone calls, things like that."

The name, incidentally, was originally going to be "A Day in the Life of..." but "we had to change our title because we found out people were being used for 'A Day in the Life,'" he said.

The Redbank Center for Research in Black Culture in Manhattan will be housing about 25 photos from the project in February in a show tentatively called "Portraits in Newark—you can see the face and you see the life behind it," he said.

The two are also reaching word from the city council on a recent for funding.

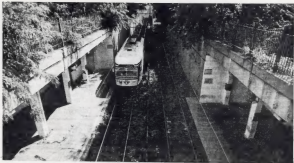
"We submitted a budget to the municipal council," Massa said. "But, we kind of got, even if nobody gives us anything, we're going to be out on the street doing anyway."

When they faced the project, Massa and Johnson decided to go ahead with it even if no volunteers stepped forward. "We decided even if it was just the two of us, with all the images in the city, we can do a hell of a job," Massa said.

The amount of film donated by Rumsen Kodak is far in excess, he said, and photographers participating don't report to have their own supplies. Massa and Johnson will be issuing credentials to those working on the project and will help in get photographs from the law firm, movies or organizations the photographers wish to shoot.

The topics to be covered are as wide-ranging as the photographers. "We've been collecting the list for about eight weeks," he said, adding that some assignments made by him of certain areas of the city are left over to the photographer's selection.

"We feel most of the city will get



One of the quainter visual features of Newark is the city's subway system, captured here by Star-Ledger photographer Jerry McCrea. Photographers looking for interesting angles will undoubtedly shoot it during 'A Day in the City'.

covered," he said.

Make no mistake about it, you might not get the gritty, scary picture that people often think of as Newark. This is strictly a positive project, focusing in the good aspects of the city.

"Our goal is to show a positive image of Newark at this time and in the future," Massa said. "Right now, it looks like people were waiting for this to happen."

Ask any photographer familiar with the city, and he or she can probably name a dozen different places to photograph. Massa's own list of subjects will probably find him running down streets in tonight trying to accomplish his goals.

"I'm walking out of my house and getting on the bus, I go downtown every day," Massa said, telling how he plans to photograph his daily route in the city.

He also agrees to shoot Port Newark with his friend Johnson, and added, "I'm also going to shoot Broad and Market (streets) over the course of the day and nights."

"I love Newark," he continued. "I'm going to shoot certain things that someone from Long Branch is not going to shoot."

At the start, photographers will be donating their time, with no other gain besides contributing to a photographic project. Massa said he hopes the project, which has yet to find an exhibi-

tor in Newark, will result in additional future plans for the photographers.

"We also want to do a poster, just cards and a book," he said, adding that proceeds from some of these items may result in some form to the photographers.

Additionally, "We wanted to have some sort of organization come out of this," he continued. "We don't want to dissipate all this energy." Assembling a photography group would be worth while, he added, even if it's just to get together and show portfolios to each other.

"We're trying to create the conditions for that. We want photographers to be paid for working that day. We're also like this slow to take."

"Gallery space has been the toughest part," he said. "We thought about putting it in the library." That was because the Newark Museum publicly had them in exhibition halls were looked well in advance of the intended photography show.

Anyone interested in contributing goods, services or money in this venture should contact Johnson and Massa through the Newark Municipal Public Information Office, City Hall, 101 Broad St., Room 214.

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